

THE LEARNING System

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Evaluations serve as pathways for professional growth

Teacher-led teams help build evaluation system that promotes learning

By Valerie von Frank

For teachers in at least six New York districts, evaluations mean a lot more now than a piece of paper filed away in a manila folder in the main office. These educators are using evaluations to mark the path of professional growth in a new system created *by* teachers *for* teachers.

The New York State United Teachers association began work that would lead to the Teacher Evaluation and Development system, known as TED, even before the 2009 Race to the Top and the federal School Improvement Grant programs spurred district and state initiatives across the nation to overhaul how teachers are evaluated. Teams of teachers and district administrators from six districts — Albany, Hempstead, Marlboro, North Syracuse, Plattsburgh, and Poughkeepsie — came together over several years to research and design a new strategy, supported by grants from the American Federation of Teachers and the U.S. Department of Education.

The intent, according to Carolyn Williams, educational services and project coordinator for New York State United Teachers, was to involve teachers in creating evaluations that would develop into meaningful dialogues and plans for continued professional learning. Past evaluations, she said, had not provided constructive feedback that teachers could use to take action.



“There was clear agreement that the old teacher evaluation system had no impact in terms of helping teachers in their practice,” Williams said. “Most teachers received no support to develop their own effectiveness and capacity.”

The teams set out to transform the old system of evaluation that involved sole administrator observations, what some termed “subjective drive-by evaluations,” to more comprehensive, meaningful reviews that involve multiple measures of teacher performance and are designed to promote teacher learning and growth.

“TED’s strength is that it brings practitioners in to analyze their own practice, which is the critical component to making instructional shifts,” Maria Neira, the union’s vice president, said in a statement.

DEVELOP AN APPROACH THAT DRIVES IMPROVEMENT

Williams said the first need before developing a differ-

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Implementation: The second dimension of professional learning

Atruism in education is that professional learning is a process, not an event. Nevertheless, many educators continue to experience learning as an isolated activity. The thinking, talking, and planning of school system and school leaders may focus primarily on professional learning as a workshop, skill development session, college course, or a conference. Leaders' expectations may center on how many educators participate in such an event and, perhaps, what they learn from it. While leaders may hope that educators will use their new learning to improve their practice, often they don't ensure there is the time or support necessary to produce that result. This stunts professional learning and limits its impact and benefits.

School system and school leaders should think of professional learning as having two dimensions. The first concerns conceiving, developing, organizing, managing, and producing, or contracting for, activities that engage educators in new learning. This has traditionally been the focus of professional development, and it continues to consume enormous resources and effort.

The second dimension of profes-

sional learning is what happens *after* learning experiences: in the context of their daily work, educators apply, practice, and refine their new learning, and document and assess the results. Most school system and school leaders have devoted much less attention and many fewer resources to this dimension of professional learning. The result is that in many communities, professional development has been, and continues to be, a half-a-loaf enterprise. It's better than nothing, but neither educators nor their students realize the full potential of effective professional learning.

This is why one of the seven professional learning standards addresses the importance of implementation. This standard recognizes that unless education leaders invest in implementation, professional learning will not increase educators' performance levels. Equally important, the standard implies that without serious attention to implementation, professional learning will risk a loss of support among both educators and the public.

As the standard makes clear, one aspect of implementation is helping educators understand that the purpose of professional learning is to change their practice. But educators are no different from other people. They may resist change, especially when their experience is that it means more work and apprehension, as well as the possibility of failure. Too often educators have been the subjects of high expectations, but only a smattering of professional development, followed by

little or no workplace support. This is why school system leaders and front-line educators must understand that the implementation of professional learning is a change process. It takes time. It requires clarity about purpose and intended outcomes, realigning the daily demands on educators, and practical, adaptive on-the-ground assistance. Understanding and applying the findings of change research to implementation will increase the chances that educators will be partners, not just participants, in effective professional learning.

As is true across all the standards, successful implementation depends on each of the other six standards. Thinking leaders are essential. Adequate resources, appropriately and equitably deployed, are necessary. Judicious use of data is foundational. Learning designs that positively impact educators' practice are indispensable. The standards only "work" if they work together.

To date, implementation has been the weak link in the chain of decisions and actions that constitute professional learning. It is so much more than developing and conducting a learning activity. Professional learning can only be effective if school system and school leaders understand it as a comprehensive, complex system and focus greater effort and resources on implementation that educators value.

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Addressing diversity requires transparency, fidelity, and modeling

The nature of Monroe Township's community, and particularly its rapidly growing diversity, has exceeded even predictions made just a few years ago. What Monroe will look like five years from now is likely to be very different.

What that means is we have to be sure our curriculum is culturally and socially relevant so that all children feel embraced, respected, and honored in the educational process, even as we think about such things as how we develop our school calendar, which holidays we recognize, and what kinds of textbooks we want. Those are important decisions as we create an environment that embraces diversity. Each person's common responsibility, then, is to be certain our community is embracing diversity.

We try to make certain we are as transparent as possible in talking about issues of race, diversity, and cultural significance. It would be easy to let this happen by osmosis, but it is essential to have conversations about who we are, what we represent, and what our core beliefs are. You have to have courageous conversations.

My responsibility as superintendent is to be true to our core values, and as long as we are true to the core values that are infused in our mission and vision statement, it's a matter of doing the work in accordance with what we say we're about. Our decision-making process shows those connections between our action plan, our core beliefs, and what we want kids to know and be able to do. We

use guiding questions in our decision making:

- What does this have to do with where we are going in our mission?
- Does this decision honor our core beliefs?

If the answer is no, then why do it? If the answer is yes, we can be confident we are making the right decisions for the right reasons.

We also began

the year in our monthly meeting with an administrative book study of *White Privilege* (Rothenberg, 2004). The book

shines the light on things we do organizationally that may unintentionally perpetuate the very things we are trying to change. Principals met in their own professional learning communities to have conversations about who we are, what we represent, and how we deal with our own issues and biases — and about how we have conversations around behaviors we see that may not complement our core values.

In addition, I believe in modeling the behavior I want my principals to emulate and then having the principals model the behavior they want their teachers to emulate. It has a trickle-down effect. I hold professional development with principals, which

includes our summer retreat each year and articles we share throughout the course of the year, and we have conversations about our own professional growth. Principals then spearhead these same conversations at the building level with their staffs at grade-level or full-staff meetings, depending on the content. Courses for our teachers also reflect that same stream of information.



One of the things we've been able to do well is acknowledge change and prepare people by developing a culture that supports systemic change.

REFERENCE

Rothenberg, P.S. (Ed). (2004). *White privilege*. New York, NY: Worth Publishers.

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ent evaluation was to have clear standards to define effective teaching. Existing professional development standards were “not anchored in a coherent definition of what teachers need to know,” she said.

With clear, common standards for effective teaching, and using research and the input of noted national experts, the union’s teams then created a rubric for evaluation that meets state requirements for performance reviews. The research-based evaluation tool was field-tested and sets out specific, measurable, observable behaviors that demonstrate effective teaching practices.

When evaluations are done well, they can drive teacher improvement (Kane, Taylor, Tyler, & Wooten, 2011). The evaluation and development system’s developers say the system clearly links evaluation to professional learning by asking not only, “How well are you doing?” but then having teachers ask themselves, “How can I improve?” The system integrates meaningful, targeted professional learning, goal setting, and career development into the evaluation. The system’s handbook (NYSUT, n.d.) states, “TED defines evaluations not as culminating events, but as stepping stones to continual professional development” (p. 13).

A good evaluation system should not only measure a teacher’s effectiveness but also help improve the teacher’s ability to be effective, researchers say. “Professionals take charge of their own growth and development by constantly seeking to strengthen teaching effectiveness and the quality of their teaching and that of their colleagues” according to Cogshall et al. (2012, p. 14), who go on to define well-designed evaluation systems as:

- Helping teachers and school leaders develop a common understanding of effective practice and performance expectations.
- Providing evidence-based feedback to teachers to help them reflect on and improve their practice.
- Measuring and accounting for teachers’ learning and collaboration.

The evaluation and development system works to ensure a process that advances teacher growth — and thus student learning — through a cycle that includes self-reflection, pre-observation and classroom observation, dialogue, and individualized professional learning.

ESTABLISH CONSTRUCTIVE SELF-REFLECTION

Self-reflection begins with a teacher self-reflection in which the teacher analyzes her own practices, objectives, and beliefs, usually in writing, to discuss with an evaluator and peers. Teachers complete a form as the groundwork for

setting goals. Questions include:

- How do my plans for this year reflect the specific needs of my incoming students?
- How has any recent professional learning informed my understanding of teaching and learning for this year?
- Are there any professional development strategies or opportunities that might be especially appropriate for my professional growth needs in this academic year?
- Based on my self-reflection, what adjustments do my goals or professional learning plan require?

INCLUDE MULTIPLE MEASURES

The second phase includes a pre-observation conference with the evaluator to talk about the teacher’s self-reflection and his or her lesson plan, student learning objectives, and instructional strategies for the lesson to be observed. The teacher and evaluator discuss how these elements relate to specific teaching standards. Only after the teacher and evaluator have discussed the preparation does the evaluator observe in the classroom.

The process requires at least one formal observation and a second observation that may be formal (including pre- and post-conference discussions) or informal. The evaluator collects evidence during the observation, such as teacher and student interaction, procedures, pacing, instructional and questioning strategies, and so on. Evaluators receive extensive training in what data to collect and how to structure meaningful conversations about the evidence. They practice and their results are compared with other raters to generate inter-rater reliability.

In a post-observation conference soon after the observation, the teacher and evaluator review and discuss student work and the success of the lesson. They may review other evidence. Teaching artifacts might include lesson plans, unit plans, teacher presentations, slide shows, diagrams, reflective journal entries, parent contact log, action research projects, surveys, interviews, survey data, discipline data, or other documentation (photography, audiotape, videotape, transcripts of student presentations). The teacher and evaluator analyze areas of strength and areas for growth, then plan next steps.

The evaluator prepares a report that summarizes the evidence of the teacher’s practice, meeting with the teacher to discuss scores and the rationale for each. The state requires teachers to be given a composite score based on a 100-point scale:

- **60%:** Multiple measures of effectiveness from the first phases of the process.
- **20%:** Student growth on state assessments or a comparable measure of student growth (increased to 25% if a value-added growth model is used).

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Learning Forward BELIEF

Successful leaders create and sustain a culture of learning.

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- **20%:** Other locally selected measures of student growth or achievement (decreased to 15% when a value-added growth model is used).
Teachers are rated highly effective, effective, developing, or ineffective.

CREATE INDIVIDUAL LEARNING PLANS

The teacher and evaluator use the information they have gathered to create an individual professional learning plan that lays out what learning opportunities the teacher may have to advance her practice, with individual goals tied to school and district goals.

The plan outlines specific professional learning and how it will be documented.

This goal-setting allows individuals to differentiate based on their needs. Some teachers may need to focus on areas for growth if they had lower scores, while others who were rated highly effective may build on areas of interest.

The teacher and evaluator meet after the formal observation to talk about the teacher's progress toward individual goals, and may meet more often as needed. The evaluation report also details the teacher's work toward meeting individual learning goals.

INCORPORATE EVIDENCE-BASED FEEDBACK

Feedback from evaluations helps create more meaningful learning experiences for teachers. Good evaluations can guide and support professional learning (Curtis & Weiner, 2012).

McGraw describes the evaluation and development system as akin to having a physical. She said the data gathered describe the condition of teaching at the moment, and the next step is to review what actions will benefit the individual's current "health."

"Professional development provides the treatment plan" for individuals, she said. "We craft the professional development around what is needed as opposed to using big brush stroke professional development where we just say, 'Everybody come.'"

"We have a system that's linked to student achievement," Williams continued. "Districts are going to have to think differently about their professional development. It's how you take the information (from the evaluations) and help teachers to grow and develop that is what TED is all about. We are always going back to what this means in terms of professional development and how well we ensure that this is a growth-producing system."

BUILD ON TRUST

John Kuryla, president of the North Syracuse Education Association, said beginning to use the new evaluation

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Goe, L., Holdheide, L., & Miller, T. (2011, May). *A practical guide to designing comprehensive teacher evaluation systems*. Available at www.tqsource.org/publications/practicalGuideEvalSystems.pdf.

The New Teacher Project. (2010, October). *Teacher evaluation 2.0*. Available at <http://tntp.org/publications/issue-analysis/teacher-evaluation-2.0>.

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"wasn't all roses," because of the amount of planning and packaging involved. Still, he said, the reliability of the results and the emphasis on teachers' learning rather than a punitive system make the challenges worthwhile.

"All of this work is predicated on trust," Kuryla said. "It's not a gotcha system intended to highlight areas of deficit and use that to destroy the ineffective."

Teacher Dearl Topping, who participated in the group developing the evaluation, is a veteran teacher in A.B. Schultz Middle School in Hempstead (N.Y.) Public Schools. On a United Teacher's video about the system, she said the new evaluation is beneficial.

"It gave me a feeling of: This should have been in place a long time ago," Topping said.

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Personal learning plan

Use this tool to work with teachers to determine their unique learning needs for each standard. Create one copy of the personal learning plan for each standard and each teacher. Be as specific as possible in identifying what each teacher needs to learn and how the school will measure the impact of that learning.

Standard:
Date:
What do I need to learn in order to improve student learning regarding this standard?
What options are available to help me learn this?
What would be my preferred way to learn this?
What steps do I need to take to ensure that I am able to learn in the way that best suits my needs?
How will I know that I have learned what is necessary? What changes in student learning will I see as a result of this?
When will I evaluate the impact of what I have learned on my students' learning?
With whom will I share my results?

Source: NSDC. (2001, December/January). Personal learning plan. *Tools for Schools*, 4(3), 6. Available at www.learningforward.org/publications/tools-for-learning-schools.

The New York State United Teachers teacher evaluation and development process

For each phase, teachers and evaluators share responsibilities for preparation, discussing evidence, and assessing teacher effectiveness in light of the New York State Teaching Standards.

In the first phase, self-assessment and reflection, teachers use a series of questions to assess their readiness for the school year ahead, particularly in the context of changes that may have occurred in their professional lives, or in the school community since the previous academic year. Self-assessment and reflection bridges the goal setting from the previous year's evaluation to a new school year context.

Using the New York State United Teachers teacher practice rubric as a unique window on "what teachers should know and be able to do," the second phase of evaluation stretches from the analysis of teaching artifacts (which occurs in the

preconference), through observation & evidence collection, and concludes with a review of student work (post-conference). Across these three major activities, teacher and evaluator collect evidence of teacher effectiveness, exchange ideas, analyze artifacts, and reflect on student work.

The summative evaluation ties together evidence of teacher professional practice with evidence of student achievement in the composite score of teacher effectiveness. Recommendations for growth areas are identified.

Goal setting and a professional learning plan provide teachers and evaluators with the opportunity to address growth areas with creative interventions aligned with school and district goals, and establishes the groundwork for succeeding years' teacher evaluation and development.

Four-phase annual evaluation process

1 Self-assessment and reflection	2 Multiple measures: Analysis of teaching, artifacts, observations, review of student work	3 Summative evaluation	4 Goal setting and professional learning plan
<p>Self-assessment and reflection allows teachers to share their perspectives on their professional and instructional practices.</p>	<p>2A: In the preconference, the teacher and evaluator prepare for the evaluation measure(s). The conference includes identifying the measure, the expectations of both parties, and the provision of any relevant documentation.</p> <p>2B: Evidence is collected during a scheduled classroom observation or other planned activity.</p> <p>2C: In the post-conference, the teacher and evaluator assess student work; provide feedback; and discuss next steps for teacher's professional growth.</p>	<p>The summative evaluation contains a teacher's rating of effectiveness, and the rationale supporting conclusion.</p> <p>The summative evaluation should note both strengths and areas in need of improvement, and make specific recommendations to improve a teacher's effectiveness.</p>	<p>4A: In goal setting, teachers have the opportunity to identify ways to enhance instructional practice and student achievement, and to tie their individual goals to the attainment of school and district goals.</p> <p>4B: Professional learning plans are, in effect, customized, multiphase strategies to support individual teachers to improve effectiveness and student learning.</p> <p>Plans are informed by the summative evaluation and other inputs. Plans will vary widely in their approaches to teacher growth and development.</p>

Source: NYSUT. (2012). *Teacher evaluation and development evaluation process workbook*. Latham, NY: Author.

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